



The Resource Room – External Supports

Reena Ryall

This article analyses the role of the regular teachers, principal and management in helping to sustain the resource room.

Over the years it has been seen that teachers are disinclined towards the policy of inclusion of children with special needs in the regular classroom. Their concerns come from varied factors like amount of time such children might need, poor performance, how it might affect the other children, as well as their own sense of inadequacy about their training and skills to handle such situations. However it is known that teacher attitudes impact student's educational outcomes¹ and when it is a negative attitude it is a cause for concern. A resource room is a classroom where children can receive individual academic instruction for goals listed in the IEP (Individual Educational Programme) which will help them learn strategies that will improve their performance in the class. The resource room is particularly beneficial to children with dyslexia and other learning disorders as direct individual teaching is required. In the resource room children receive learning support in a positive environment. The concept of the resource room facility or the learning support facility has not yet caught on in India. Though awareness levels have improved in recent years, the principal and school managements still fail to see the crucial link that the resource room provides in the circle of education. Mostly viewed as a specialised area connected with special education, catering to the needs of too small a number of children, creating a financial burden that is considered optional, most schools are of the opinion that they can manage without a resource room. This is a case of being penny wise and pound

foolish. A close analysis will highlight how crucial and beneficial early identification of educational problems is and how early intervention can actually improve the overall performance of not just the handful of children enrolled for learning support but the whole class.

True purpose of the resource room

The resource room has been misconstrued as a dumping ground for 'unmanageable' children. Regular teachers view the resource room as an alternative to classroom disaster. However the resource room serves several important purposes:

- The only purpose of the resource room is to tap the underlying potential of a child whose performance in tests and exams is way below actual potential or ability, through innovative highly individualised teaching methods.
- The resource room has the amazing and valuable capacity to recognise and assess learning difficulties as early as possible as well as draw up early intervention programmes for children as early as kindergarten.
- This actually minimises the number of children who develop learning problems due to secondary factors. The resource room also has its eyes open for children who might develop late emerging learning problems.
- The resource room is the unrecognised missing link – the answer to regular teacher woes, to the math teacher who is at his/her wits end as to how to teach comprehension of statement sums or multiple methods to do multiplication, or the history teacher who is not up to mind mapping of every chapter.

¹Good, T.L., & Brophy, J.E. (1997). *Looking in classrooms (seventh edition)*. New York: Longman.

- The resource room is a treasure house of classroom activities for all topics in all subjects. If a systematic interactional process between regular class teachers and resource teachers is put in place, exchange of ideas, exchange of knowledge and creativity leads to a situation where the resource room could actually become redundant with every teacher becoming acquainted with ways to provide individual assistance to needy students within the classroom itself.

The attitudinal barriers to the success of the resource room

The resource room faces many obstacles in its pursuit of survival. School managements dread the expense, regular teachers dread extra workshops that tell them how to run their classes, parents dread labelling of their child, and children dread becoming the object of ridicule while being hustled off to the resource room during their favourite periods like art, music, games etc. It is fair to say that the only challenge is in the mindset of everyone.

- **The principal and school management**

The principal and school management should weigh the long term benefits and invest in not one or two special educators but a team of special educators who can provide regular training to all teachers in the school, increase the coping ability of the teacher who has to manage children of varying profiles, which is becoming the reality of today's classroom. If the school wants to up its results, up its commitment to education, up its recognition of being a really 'good' school then it should provide access to early identification, informal assessment, and remedial help to children who require it. The difficulties arise when principals are ignorant of learning disabilities and fail to take cognizance of its increasing prevalence. Small mindedness

takes over when there is reluctance to part with the salary for the special education teacher viewing it as an option rather than an antidote. On the other hand, the resource room that enjoys the support of the principal and management runs for years and years unhindered in rendering vital support to many children who would have otherwise not even had a slim chance of making it to the next grade. The resource room becomes the clinic where early remedy is the best remedy. It has been seen that management attitudes to the resource room make all the difference. The support given by the principal strongly dictates teachers' methods of teaching as well as behaviour towards children with disabilities². Today we know that when the school administration is supportive teachers are more willing to accommodate children with disabilities³.

- **Regular teachers' attitudes**

One of the main barriers to integrating students with disabilities has been teachers' attitudes⁴. This is disheartening as the whole process of providing learning support to a child does not happen in isolation. It is a chain which gets broken if any one link is not strong enough to hold the system in place. When a child is identified as having learning disabilities it is only right to provide means to the child whereby academic performance can improve. If this commitment is lacking in the general teachers then the resource room finds it very difficult to stay afloat. For all teachers to have a supportive enthusiastic attitude towards the resource room it is important to provide teachers with positive experiences through introduction of inclusive practices in the classroom, pre service training and regular insight into the learning process. An important study suggested that teacher's

² Ross-hill(2009) Teacher attitude towards inclusion practices and special needs students. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* Volume 9, Issue 3, November 2009

³ Soodak, L.C.; Podell, D.M.; Lehman, L.R. (1998). Teacher, student, and school attributes as predictors of teachers' responses to inclusion. *Journal of Special Education*, 31 (4), pp. 480-498

⁴ Avramidis, E. & Norwich, B. (2002). Mainstream teachers' attitudes towards inclusion/integration: a review of the literature. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 17(2), 1-19.

attitudes towards inclusion are influenced by their previous experiences in inclusive classrooms⁵ thereby highlighting the importance of exposure to the resource room and its related activities in the classroom.

- **Teacher training**

Teacher training courses in India have failed to cover special education needs adequately. Teachers are unaware and if aware then resistant to differential teaching. For the success of the resource room even if regular teachers are not trained in understanding learning disorders, it is imperative that they have some knowledge about it. The current training for teachers does not expose teachers to children with learning disabilities at all. The view is then that the resource room is a place where specialised teachers babysit children who are unable to cope in class, and often classroom teachers label children as badly behaved when in truth they have sincere difficulties in picking up reading, spelling and writing. This is because they are unable to recognise children's symptoms correctly. The attitude towards the resource room is condescending. This attitude greatly underrates the improvement of the child. Given that children with special education needs are present in every classroom and on the rise, it is

crucial to improvise and update the syllabus in all teacher training institutes. In schools that employ teachers with willingness to teach children with disabilities, the attitudes towards the resource room are highly positive. This contributes to effective communication between the resource room, classroom, parent and back. It also facilitates classroom support as the teacher might be more flexible, patient, improvising and encouraging. Often with cooperative class teachers the child is given more time, assistance and options. Such teachers work with the resource room in helping to identify children for assessment, share portions and strategies as well as aim for academic success of the child with learning problems.

In conclusion, learning support is not an option: it is the right of every child. In view of the reality of a classroom where differential teaching is the only option, then the resource room becomes its shoulder to lean on by offering a range of services that belong not just to the purview of special education but to the scope of general education as well.

⁵ Leatherman1, Jane M. Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusion: Factors Influencing Classroom Practice. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education* Vol 26(1) 2005

Reena is a cognitive psychologist and special educator in the field of learning disabilities. She is associated with Brindavan Education Trust, Jayanagar Bangalore, a centre for teaching, training and assessing children with learning disabilities and has been working with children, teachers and parents for over 15 years. She recently authored the book, 'The Indian Resource Room' as a tool for teachers and parents. She is a regular contributor to Deccan Herald on issues related to education. She may be contacted at drreenaryall@gmail.com